

*The Lord Bishop  
from the  
author.*

THE  
RECIPROCAL DUTIES  
OF  
PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

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A SERMON,  
Preached Before the Deanery of Shediac,

AT

MONCTON, N. B., DEC. 15TH, 1874,

BY

REV. D. NICKERSON, A. M.,  
RECTOR OF SACKVILLE,

AND

Published by Request of the Deanery.

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PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF THE CHIGNECTO POST.

AND

J. & A. McMILLAN, St. JOHN, N. B.

1875.

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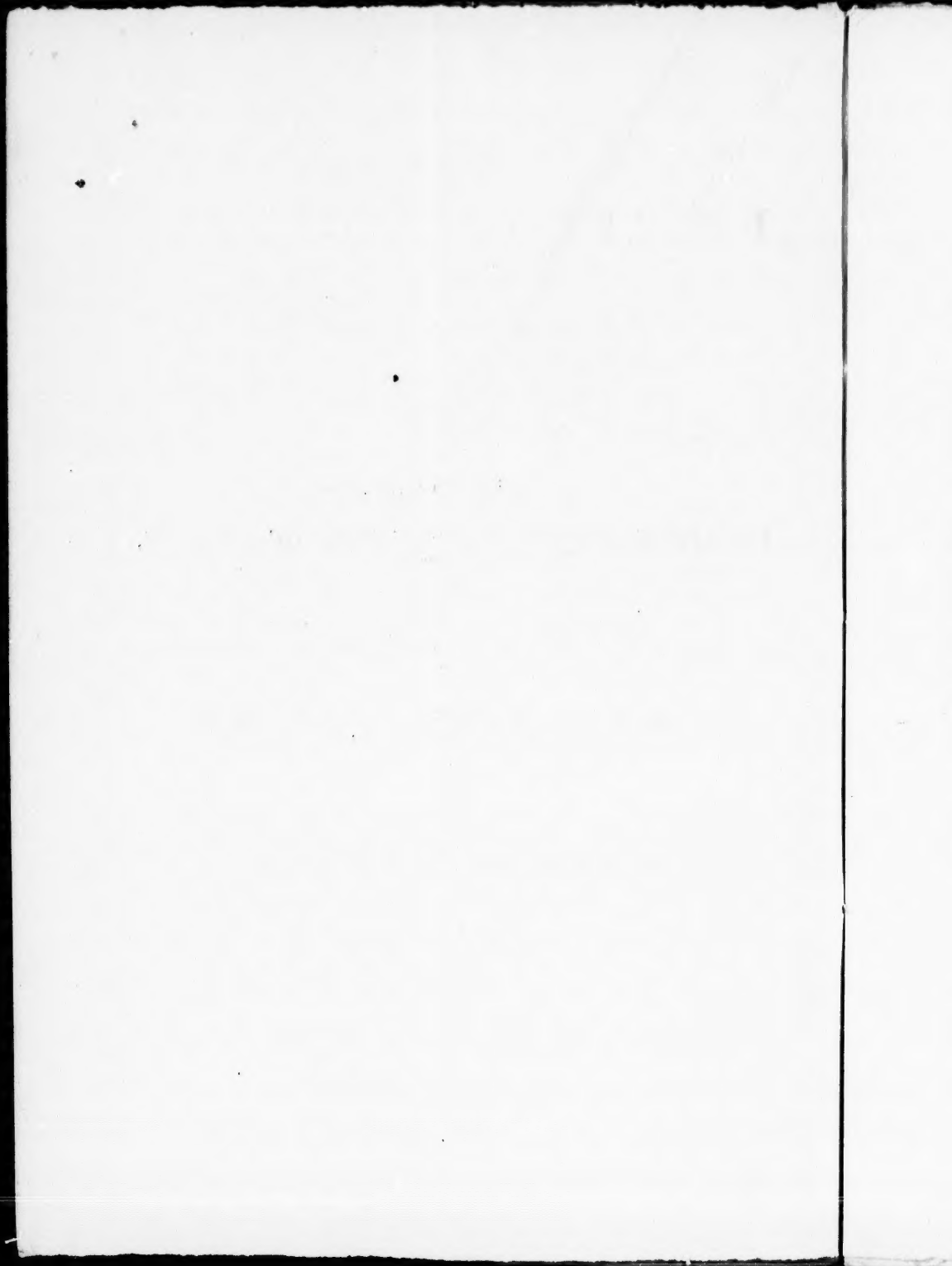
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### TO THE READER.

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The following sermon was originally prepared for the St. Andrew's Deanery about a year ago, and preached before it; but being requested to preach at the late meeting of the Deanery at Shediac, the writer thinking that he could not bring a more useful or practical subject before the clergy, determined to repeat it. It is a plain, practical sermon, written without any idea of its ever being published, and given to the public now in the hope that it may do some good. Occupying only the usual time of a sermon delivered as a part of the service of the English Church, it is necessarily but a glance at a large subject.

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## SERMON.

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Study to shew thyself approved unto God.—(2 Tim. II. 15.)

It has seemed good to me, my brethren, of the clergy and laity, that the few and simple words which are to compose the address for this morning, shall aim at pointing out as plainly as possible the reciprocal duties we owe each other as clergy and people. For this is a subject we should all hear of once in a while, as it is one of the most important that can occupy our attention. We can easily judge of this from the fact that when the relations existing between a rector and his people are such as they ought to be on both sides, how rapidly God's work progresses in that parish. How the interests of His Church are advanced. How consequently the parishioners by having more regard for religion become better and holier men and women, and more anxious to be ready in every good word and work for God and His Church. How the pastor's happiness increases in a ratio corresponding with his success, and how light and confident is his step, and ready his smile for every one as he goes about his Master's work. On the other hand when these reciprocal relations are *not* what they ought to be, what a different picture to this meets the eye. God's work and His Church both languish in that parish. for it is a house divided against itself, and must on the authority of Christ certainly fall. The pastor and people instead of working together for God, and both in *His* way, are strongly opposed to each other, each party usually endeavoring to have everything in their own way. The usual, because natural results always follow, of indifference and languor in some, dispersion with others; and, such is the weakness of our human nature, often mutual reproach, and sometimes even quarrel and hatred, and consequently the unpleasant scandal which in every case is sure to follow, and spread far and near. As then all, and more especially those who have ever experienced parochial difficulties, can readily understand how unpleasant they may become; we shall all, clergy and people, be the more willing to consider the things that make, not only for peace, but for progress for Christ's Kingdom, and the spiritual welfare and happiness of its members.



In any christian community, my brethren, clergymen are a necessity, and probably will be while the world stands. They certainly will be while men continue to be as they are, the good and the evil mingled together; and if it is true that the tares and wheat are to grow together till the the harvest, we may say they will certainly be necessary till then. They are necessary for three reasons; the first of which is as a bulwark between men and their doubts. We all know there are many who have neither the time, nor the inclination, nor the education to test their belief of the Bible, by reading and studying for themselves. Now if at any time a disposition to doubt the truth of their religion crosses their minds, they often think first of their own minister, who is, we will say, a man of undoubted piety and learning; and then, to put it briefly, of all the clergy in the world who are devoting their lives to preaching the Gospel. These men they think are not wearing themselves out in a cause they doubt the truth of, especially when the worldly inducements to labour in the service are so few. We can more readily understand this by thinking of the fall and disgrace of any clergyman from his position. Every one at once exclaims: "What a blow to religion!" And naturally so. For they argue mentally that when leaders are weak or insincere, what can be expected of the followers.

In the second place if a particular church is to thrive, or even to maintain an existence in a community, the experience of all mankind in all ages, bears testimony to the truth that it must have an acknowledged head or leader in that place. If it has no head to conduct and keep it together, it very soon suffers the inevitable consequence of death.

In the third place a clergyman is a necessity in a community not only to keep down immorality and wickedness, but to incite both by example and precept those who are servants of God to continued exertions. There are some unthinking people in the world who do not believe this. Indeed there have been some thinking men who have not believed it either. As however the value of some things may be learned from their absence, think for a moment what any community would become if the restraining effects of religion were removed. What would this town become in a moral point of view, if on Sundays no place of worship was ever open? If the word of God was never preached at all? If children came into the world, grew up and passed their lives not only without the sacred rite of Baptism, but without the moral training of the Sunday School, or home influences either? If the sick were to die without the blessed consolations of our holy religion: and were

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consigned to the earth without a word either of comfort for the bereaved mourner, or of hope for the future? If too, there was no religion to sanctify by its presence the solemn and sacred rite of marriage? Those who have read of the state of morality in France after the revolution of the last century, when a generation was allowed to grow up without ever having heard of God or of heaven, need no reminder of what society in any country would become if it divested itself entirely of religion. Yet this is precisely what any community would do in time if permanently deprived of its clergy, just as certainly as insubordination and want of discipline would follow the loss of the officers of an army.

If then the clergyman is a necessity in a community, the next point is that one be obtained. And in saying *one*, I mean one whom his people and himself can consider a man commissioned by the Almighty to declare all His counsel. One who can feel that he is really among the number of the watchmen of whom the Lord speaks when he says:

"I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem."—(Is. LXII. 6.)

And not of those of whom He says:

"I have not sent these prophets—yet they ran:

"I have not spoken to them—yet they prophesied."—(Jer. XXIII. 21.)

And here it may be well to consider for a moment what it is makes a clergyman. Social position does not, for many of the laity occupy better positions socially than many of the clergy. Birth does not make a clergyman either, as again many of the laity may be better born. Wealth, or friends, or influence, or education, or deep piety either does not make a clergyman, as they all can exist in the laity, and often to a greater extent than among the clergy. There is only one thing then that can make a clergyman and that is ordination. To be a true cleric then, our Church teaches he must have good orders, and as the affirmative or positive implies the negative, such a thing as false or wrong ordination is possible, bringing into existence a false order of clergy. We have reason however, my dear brethren of the clergy to be thankful; and you have reason brethren of the laity to congratulate yourselves, that we belong to a church which believes in the validity of the orders of her ministers, and what is of infinitely more value, can prove it too. We have reason to be thankful especially so, as in the present day the prevailing error may be said to be laxity of religious belief. When the notion is too universal-ly prevalent that you may believe what you please, so long as you

do what is right, and all will be well. In fact we live in such an advanced and enlightened age that men do not now care to believe or to hear such antiquated, old-fashioned truths as: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you will seek to enter in and shall not be able" (Luke XIII. 24) "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth into life, and few there be that find it," (Math. VII. 14.) They are too ready to call such notions "narrow" and "bigoted," and to say: "Acknowledge the equality of all, and mingle freely with all. That is the more liberal view, for we shall all meet in heaven." True, and while hoping that God may enable us all so to live that we may meet the tens of thousands in heaven who shall have got there by a different way from ours, I must yet dispute the validity of the argument. For if we ought to associate with others in spiritual matters because we shall meet in heaven, let us be more liberal and associate in temporal matters with all whom we shall meet in heaven. And following out this let us take the different races of the world to our beds and boards, and admit them to our intercourse, and mingle as freely with them as with our own race because we shall meet in heaven. If it is right to do the one it is right to do the other. If there are no spiritual distinctions, let us have no temporal ones either. Further what we shall do or be in heaven, is not a correct unit of measurement for what we ought to do or be on earth. There we shall be as angels, and immortal; here we are human and mortal. There we may suppose our aim will be angelic perfection, and our employment angelic; here, our employments and aim ought to be the cultivation not of angelic, but human perfection. For example in heaven the married state will be done away, while here, marriage is honorable in all, (Heb., XIII. 4) and plainly could not be discontinued by all.

Knowing then, brethern of the laity from whence we derive our commission and our authority, from the great Head of the Church, from Him who has said to us just as much as to the Apostles:—"as My Father hath sent me, even so send I you;" you will pardon us if like St. Paul we "magnify our office." Not ourselves, mark you, and observe it well. God forbid and keep us from that, for when we begin that we lower and degrade our sacred office, and deservedly forfeit the esteem and respect of our people. No but we magnify our office, the sacred office that God has given us, and when we speak, feel that we speak by virtue of our office, and not from any inherent good or right in ourselves. And, brethern, we have all felt this. We have all felt at times when standing before the Almighty to minister, that in the congregation there may be

many who are our superiors in many respects, so that they can criticise our work and see its weak points plainly enough; yet they are bound to hear us and our message, however feeble it may be, since we do not speak in our own name, but in God's: since we do not proclaim ourselves, but Him. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Tim. I. 7.)

And if brethren of the clergy, we remember this, we shall better follow the advice of the text which tells us who is the real critic of our work, whom we are most anxiously to strive to please if we would succeed in our ministry—God Himself. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God;" and that, "not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart fearing Him."

It is not necessary for me to remind upon how important our office really is. That is something which is brought before the faithful minister's eyes in every part or office of his sacred profession. It appears plainly enough when he leads the kneeling congregation in their devotions, and when he stands at the Holy Table to dispense in the name of His Master His broken Body and shed Blood. The importance of the office is plain enough to the man who, feeling that he is called of God to declare His will, proclaims to the assembled congregation the message of a crucified Saviour's love. Plainly enough too, when at the bed-side of the dying he elevates his voice that the straining ear may not lose the "comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all them that truly turn to Him"; and when he places the morsel of consecrated bread upon the tongue, and touches the lips with the sacred wine, of the recipient who is too weak to assist himself. Yes, it appears plainly enough in all these, and frequently enough also, so that often the soul is constrained to cry; "Who is sufficient for these things?" So that the soul feeling its weakness would shrink back in awe and trembling were it not for the cry of conscience, *Act, for the vows of thy God are upon thee!* So that when standing up to herald the messages of the Almighty it would fain exclaim "Woe is me! because I am a man of unclean lips;" were it not for the counter cry of duty, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!" In all this too, there is so much matter for thought, that the sincere servant may well tremble. We do not wonder then, that St. Paul, next to Christ the pattern minister, should in writing to Timothy make use of the word "Study." Make haste, be diligent, as it is in the original; be in earnest to shew thyself approved unto God. For there is no other calling or profession, no other earthly subject which requires more study or thought than the proper and due per

formance of clerical duties. Experience tells us this is the case. For if due thought and study of how work may best be done, not to please men but God, is not given; if we do not meditate on these things; the deficiency is soon manifest enough in some unfortunate mistake, or lamentable failure. All history too, and the lives and deeds of all great men in every walk of life, bear ample testimony to the value of thought and study as a solvent of difficulties. That we will succeed in anything, not by rushing blindly at it as it were, and expecting it to solve itself; or looking for some fortuitous concatenation of circumstances to carry us triumphantly through; but by dwelling upon it and revolving it diligently, carefully, and prayerfully in our minds in the privacy of our own closets, until with our Father's blessing we see our way through the difficulty. St. Paul knew this well enough. The paradox that thought accomplishes more than action, was plain enough to him; and that no doubt was why he told Timothy, and through him all faithful ministers to "study" to shew themselves approved. And we may profitably gather a lesson from it also, so that when questions arise, and we know them to be in every variety and frequency in recurring, we may follow the injunction contained in text, and study the matter. Observe what our conscience according to its enlightenment tells us is God's will we should do. Ask His guidance and direction in the matter, and that He will vouchsafe His heavenly light that the rough place may be made smooth; and the event will fully justify the value of the value of the trial.

The text however, and the point it brings before our notice though but one part of our duty, is yet the basis of all others. Whatever question we ask ourselves with reference to our duty is answered by it. The whole of our duty, I need scarcely remind you, may be learnt as well from these Epistles, as from all else ever written upon the subject, and as you have heard the foundation of it all is the text. Do we ask, how far consistently with my sacred calling may I engage in relaxation and amusement? "Study to shew thyself approved unto God," for sufficient thought upon the question will invariably lead to the discovery that our amusements must be tempered and regulated by our religion. Or do we ask; how shall I best go among my people without partiality? how shall I best win their love and respect? how shall I apportion my work to accomplish most? how shall I pray, worship, and preach best? The answer to all is "Study to shew thyself approved unto God." What in every case would God have me do? What is His will? That is the only question with which we have

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to concern ourselves. I we do his will too. what so many are unduly anxious to obtain, the favor of their fellow-men must follow; for we have the truth propounded for the extreme case, which always includes the intermediate degrees,

"When a man's ways please the Lord,

"He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. XVI. 7.)

Note this fact then particularly, that it is God we have to please, and let us endeavor to keep our eye fixed singly upon that truth. It is the only real safeguard the faithful priest or deacon can have, while it is ever the surest guarantee of success; for the opposite upon the authority of Holy Writ will always get one into trouble. "The fear of man bringeth a snare," (Prov. XXIX. 25.) and,

"To have respect of persons is not good:

For for a piece of bread that man will transgress."—(Ib. XXVIII. 21.)

Being approved of God also, we shall certainly be workmen that need not be ashamed. At the same time let us be guarded, **May**, most carefully guarded that when we deem ourselves to be approved of God in anything we do, we are *right*, and are really approved of Him; for the most difficult of all men to deal with, the most difficult of all men to convince that he is wrong, or to get to yield one iota of his position, is the wrong-headed man who is possessed with the notion that everything *he* does, is approved of God. The failures of a life-time are often not enough to convince such a man that he ever was mistaken.

But if the minister is to do his duty to his Master, and of necessity to his parishioners also; they in return have a duty to perform towards him. May I be allowed then briefly to touch upon these.

Being members of the Church of England you are perfectly so in considering your ministers properly called and sent, by those who have the authority to call and send men into the Lord's vineyard. You are safe also in considering them ambassadors for God since they are successors and followers of the blessed Apostles. As such, by virtue of their office, they are deserving of the respect of the laity; and in no laity it may be truly said is this respect more fully and delicately given than by the laity of the Church of England. But being ambassadors for God, they must have a certain authority and preeminence also. This is of necessity absolute in the performance of their priestly offices. No clergyman, for example, dare place himself among his people, and allow one of them to take his place at the Holy Table and administer

the Holy Communion. There is another position also in which they have authority though with limitations, and this as a guide and leader of the people in religion. The limitations would naturally be founded on want of experience, and want of training. Happily again in our church it is a very rare thing to find a clergyman who has not been well trained for the profession. The training too is especially arranged to supply as far as possible the knowledge generally acquired by years of experience. Though then, as is the case with many of us, the minister may be comparatively speaking, a young man, yet it must be borne in mind that he has spent many of the best years of his life in the study of his calling. He ought then to have more experience of theology and to know more of it, than the man who has not devoted the same amount of time to acquiring that, but something else. We look to the lawyer for law, to the banker for a knowledge of his business, to the physician for a knowledge of medicine, and to every man in short for a knowledge of his particular calling. Let us then look to the minister for theology, and though being as often happens young, this proves only that he does not know so much as the older *theologian*, since he has not had his experience; not that he does not know so much as the older *layman*. Age does not of necessity always imply more knowledge. It implies only more knowledge in its own sphere, and sometimes not even there when experience and judgment are wanting. "Let no man despise thy youth" (I Tim. IV. 12.) then is written as much for our day as Timothy's. Theology too, is not the easily mastered subject that many deem it. If it were so, good theologians would be more frequently found among the clergy. But many fancy that it is quite possible for every man to be his own exponent of theological truth. This is no doubt due to the fact that everyone reads the hand-book of religion, the Bible; but yet it is the most difficult book to understand throughout that has ever been written. The man never yet lived or will live who will rightly understand it all. Let the one then who is most deeply read and versed in it, be the authority for its exposition. There is no more priest-craft in this than the lawyer's giving of advice, or the physician's writing of a prescription.

There is another point it may be well to touch upon also, which is that it is but fair generally speaking to allow the minister to work his parish in his own way.

The people now are the real appointers of their ministers. They do not usually appoint one without knowing something about him; and then they choose one that pleases them. He is appointed to



be their clergyman, but usually that he may build up the parish, aid in the spread of religion, and the advance of the church. Now he is supposed to know something of governing his parish, and if he is judicious and careful, may be allowed to govern it in his own way. Should a majority of the parishoners oppose him, their opinion would and ought to have great weight, though it is well to remember that majorities are not always right. But when one has one way to propose, and another; another, while a third comes with a different one still; the minister can only follow his own ideas especially if opposed to them all. The great safeguard in every case however for all is *charity*; and a belief in the right motives of each other though there may be mistakes. Love too, will accomplish much in the way of agreement, while time will always bring the right to the surface; and where no great interests are at stake, it is often a useful thing to be able to wait.

But there is another thought it is well to remember. It is that the people should be as lenient as they can with the faults of their minister. All clergymen have to give up much in taking their sacred profession. They are after all but human beings with a sacred office; and will consequently exhibit to a certain extent the usual weaknesses of their age, as every age has its weakness. When these are wrong or sinful, no condemnation could be too strong. But many things ought not to be magnified as sinful, which are really not so. The influence of the Puritans has permeated society to such an extent ever since their times that an assumption of sanctity, is often more acceptable to many, than an honest, open, manly christianity. The one they think, shows a realization of the responsibilities of his position; the other they deem light and flippant. The truth is however, that in nearly every case the hearty, manly christian is the truer one. This is simply because the Almighty has given us all powers of enjoyment, and intended us to make use of them. If then a man never smiles, if he has had no great life-long trouble, there is something wrong about him, and his christianity. Usually he will be found to be hypocritical, for constant gravity is natural to very few, and is most commonly assumed. It is no sign that a minister is not a good one if he can be pleasant and merry in his manner, so long as there is no absurd levity or flippancy which would degrade his sacred office.

When real faults exist also, if not a reproach they ought to be borne with, or smoothed over, or corrected if possible. The clergyman's position is a difficult one to fill. He must be sociable and exactly so far. He must be a good visitor; a good and faithful



worker, a thorough christian and a good man. Must hold just such church views, preach just such doctrines, be gentlemanly in his manners, and neat in his personal appearance; be cheerful when requisite, and grave when gravity is demanded, he must never get angry, never make a mistake; be musical, and able to assist the choir, he must know something of everything, never get offended, and not mind slights. In short he must please every individual in the parish, and never give occasion for captious remark. This list is by no means too long, for we have all yet to see the minister who has never been accused of wanting some one or other of these advantages. They ought certainly to be examples, and they try to be so, generally speaking to the best of their ability. Absolutely perfect they cannot be, and it is well they cannot, for when all else failed, with some their very perfection would be deemed a fault.

But lastly the faithful minister ought to be cheerfully aided by his people. How many parishes have suffered and languished for want of lay help, the clergy know to their cost. For it is not possible for the minister to do everything alone. He must have the co-operation of his people. They are needed for Sunday School teachers, for the choir, and as assistants in many other ways. And yet how few of the clergy there are who can say they have always been well aided by their laity. This is a difficulty too that for some cause or other is felt more among us, than in any other denomination. Why it is so is hard to say, but the stubborn fact is there however that it is so. Yet it ought to be different. The laity of the Church are second to none in the world for real religion, for generosity and self-denial, for good and faithful church membership, for good citizenship, and for loyalty; why then should they so often be behind in many places in assisting their minister? I do not know how it is in this parish, but the complaint is very general. And yet this difficulty is the real cause of many a good clergyman's failure, and while the people found fault that he did not succeed, the fault was really in themselves that they did not help him with their labour and their prayers. But there is another way in which the cooperation of the people may be seen, which is the way they attend the services and assist in the responses and the service generally. Where these improve they are often the best sign to the minister that his labours are appreciated and enjoyed by the people (he works well, who prays well); while if they are neglected he can judge that they are so, only because the people feel what always produces neglect—partial or total indifference.

In conclusion may God bless us all clergy and people, and make us more faithful servants of Himself. Then His religion will abound and flourish more and more, and His Church increase. For when the true love of Christ is in the hearts of both minister and people, everything else requisite seems to follow as a matter of course. So true is it that Christ's blessing always follows His service, to the attainment of happiness both for this world and the next.